

**Oswestry U3A Travel Club Visit to Barnsdale Gardens, Rutland and Stamford in  
Lincolnshire on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2019**

An early start at 7.40am at the Old Station on a cool bright morning saw us immediately delayed by broken traffic lights at our new Morrison's Store. We soon sped east, traversing at least seven counties, including Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland and Lincolnshire, arriving at Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland in glorious sunshine soon after 11am.

This eight acre garden with 38 diverse "rooms" was developed by the late, much loved Gardeners' World presenter, Geoffrey Hamilton (1936-96) and is now managed by his son Nick. Many of our members remembered Geoff's gentle humour, his early promotion of organic gardening and down to earth style. I recalled how he never reckoned to own a suit and borrowed "the suit" from his twin brother, Tony, for important public occasions. Everyone found something to enjoy here; from autumn's bounty, the light through the trees, fragrant roses to water features, little hidden ponds and the excellent vegetable produce. The sight of a weed or two occasionally was refreshing. Talking of which, the restaurant was excellent, serving home-grown garden produce and all at very reasonable prices. Must come back in the spring was the main refrain. I shall remember a large white plant, complete with seven Comma butterflies and several bees, for sale in the garden centre. Our grandstand finale as we waited for everyone to gather was the vision of a wedding party arriving in their finery for a 2pm do. We coveted a rather fine green peplum dress and a navy and pale pink jacket and dress ensemble as a guitarist played to welcome the guests to a simple open air layout with autumn flowers in jars.

We couldn't linger to see the bride emerge from her transport as it was off to lovely Stamford in Lincolnshire to explore this fine stone-built town. Oh wow, what a wonderful traditional open air street market (on a fine day of course). Those big Lincolnshire spuds at only 40p per pound looked grand for baking, but no, too heavy for carting around. We rued the decline of our own market. There was a modern statue made from the local oolitic limestone in the Sheep Market area of the town and a lovely park adjacent to the River Welland.

All too soon it was 4pm and time to make the long 143 mile journey back west in the changing light as afternoon gradually faded to twilight. An amazing glowing orange sunset on our hilly border landscape enlivened the final tedious miles along the busy A5. 30 tired but happy people with lots of good memories arrived back at the Park Gates at 7.40pm.

All thanks to Jenny for pulling off yet another inspired outing on a magical Indian Summer day and our very good Lakeside driver for making steady progress on this long route.

Ruth Dawes